

A method and apparatus for setting a marker on an object and tracking the position of the object

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The field of this invention relates to digital imaging devices.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Digital imaging devices typically have many automatic settings. For example, many digital cameras automatically set the focus, the aperture, and the exposure time.

10 Some digital cameras allow the user to override or assist the automatic settings. For example, some digital cameras allow the user to set the area in the image that will be used by the camera to determine the focus. One way this is done is by centering the area in the viewfinder and pressing the shutter button halfway down. Once the camera has focused, the user re-frames the shot and presses the shutter button the rest of the

15 way down. Other cameras allow the user to mark an object to be used as the focus area, for example see US patent 5,187,585 "Image sensing apparatus with settable focus detection area" which is hereby included by reference. One way that is used to select an object is for the user to center the object in the viewfinder or display and then press a control. Once an object has been selected a marker is displayed that

20 identifies the object. There are many styles used for markers, one example is square brackets that is shown surrounding the selected object. Some cameras even allow multiple objects to be selected and marked. In many cameras today the camera tracks the selected object even when the camera is panned to reframe the scene.

Unfortunately, cameras today lose track of a selected object when the camera is

25 panned far enough that the object is no longer in the field of view of the device.

Therefore there is a need for a digital imaging device that can track the position of selected objects even when the selected objects are not currently in the field of view of the camera.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A digital imaging system that allows the user to select and mark objects with markers is disclosed. The digital imaging device tracks the position of the marked objects even when the marked objects are not in the field of view of the digital imaging system.

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Other aspects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, illustrating by way of example the principles of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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Figure 1 is a block diagram of a digital imaging system that could implement an example embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a flow chart for marking and then tracking an object in the scene in accordance with an example embodiment of the present invention.

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Figure 3 is a view of a scene with two objects marked with markers in an example embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

An electronic block diagram of a typical digital imaging device is shown in Figure 1. Digital cameras today typically contain a photo-sensor (102) for capturing

images; a display area (104) for displaying the captured images and controlling the digital camera; a storage area (116) for storing the captured images; memory (108), for temporary manipulation of the captured images and for running the firmware of the camera; a processor (110) for controlling the camera, and some type of controls (106). Some digital cameras also include a microphone (114) for capturing audio clips along with the digital images. Some digital cameras include a speaker (118) and a digital signal processor (DSP 112). The controls (106) on digital cameras may include physical controls like buttons, rocker switches, and a keyboard, and virtual controls shown in the display area. The digital images, video clips and audio clips captured by the digital camera may be stored in memory (108) or may be moved to the storage area (116). Today the memory and the storage area are typically different types of devices. The memory is typically fast volatile memory and the storage area is typically slower non-volatile memory. In the future, as the speed of non-volatile memory increases, all the memory may be of the non-volatile type. Digital imaging devices typically have an input/output (I/O) channel (122). This I/O channel may be, for example, a USB bus, a SCSI bus, an IR link, Fire Wire, or a parallel link. The I/O channel is used to connect the digital imaging device to other computer systems or networks. Some digital imaging devices connect to other computer systems using a camera dock. Digital cameras may also contain a wireless link (120) to the Internet, for example a cell phone.

Some digital cameras have more than one display area, for example a camera may have an LCD display on the back of the camera and have a micro display used as a viewfinder. Both the LCD and the micro display can be used to display a real time view of the scene viewed by the camera. This also allows the camera to display additional information in the displays as the user frames the picture. One type of

information that may be displayed is a marker to show where, in the field of view, the camera is focusing. Some cameras allow the user to set or pick an object to use for focusing, for example see US patent 5,187,585 "Image sensing apparatus with settable focus detection area". In the 585 patent, an object can be designated, and the camera
5 will use that object as the area to focus on, even if the object is moving. There are a number of well-known methods to designate an object. One way is to center the object in the viewfinder and then activate a control. Some cameras use the S1 position of the shutter button as the control (Typically, the S1 position is when the shutter button has been pressed half way down). Other cameras have controls that are
10 different than the shutter button.

Once an object has been designated, some cameras mark that object in the display area using a marker. There are many types of markers that can be used, for example square brackets can be shown surrounding the designated object. When the camera is moved to reframe the scene, the marker stays centered on the designated
15 object. In this way, the designated object is tracked as its position shifts in the field of view.

There are many ways to track objects in a scene. One way to track objects is disclosed in US patent 5,187,585 "Image sensing apparatus with settable focus detection area". In the 585 patent, an object detection module determines the image
20 characteristics of designated objects. It then uses these image characteristics to track the position of the object, even when the object is in motion. Another way to track the position of objects is disclosed in the application "Pointing device for digital camera display", number 09/484667 filed Jan. 18, 2000, hereby incorporated by reference for all that it teaches. The 667 application teaches taking multiple exposures, or frames,
25 of a scene, in quick succession. The device then compares changes between subsequent

images to calculate an amount and a direction of change for the motion of the device. Using the calculated motion of the device, the relative position of objects in the scene can be determined. For example, the device would use the first image or two to establish a frame of reference. By tracking the subsequent motion of the device
5 compared to the initial frame of reference, the direction the device is currently pointing can be determined. Using the current pointing direction and the initial frame of reference, object positions can be tracked. With a known object position inside the frame of reference, the object can be marked with a marker whenever the object position is within the field of view of the device.

10 In one example embodiment of the current invention, a scene would be viewed in an electronic display (200). An object in the scene would be designated and marked with a marker (202). A second view of the scene would be displayed, where the object is no longer visible (204). A third view of the scene would be displayed, where the object is visible (206). The object would be remarked with the marker in the third
15 view (208). In one example embodiment, the device would track the position of the object as the field of view of the device changed. In another example embodiment, the device would track the position of the object as the object moved. In another example embodiment of the current invention, additional objects could be marked and tracked.

Figure 3 shows an example embodiment for markers (302) marking two
20 objects in a scene.

In one example embodiment of the current invention, a digital device would image a view of a scene onto a photo-sensor (102). The digital device would display the view of the scene on a display (104). The digital device would contain at least one control (106) allowing user input into the digital device. The digital device would
25 contain a processor (110) configured to monitor the control (106). The processor (110

or 112) would be configured to establish an initial frame of reference when detecting user input from the control (106). The initial frame of reference would be established by reading the view of the scene from the photo sensor (102). The processor (110 or 112) would be configured to display markers in the display (104) at a predetermined location with respect to the initial frame of reference. For example, the markers could be located in the center of the field of view of the device when the initial frame of reference is established. The processor (110 or 112) would be configured to compare multiple sequential views of the scene, captured by the photo sensor (102), to track the movement of the device with respect to the initial frame of reference. Using this information the processor (110 or 112) would be configured to display the marker when the predetermined location is within the field of view of the device.

In one example embodiment, a marker is positioned over a viewed (and captured) image (*e.g.*, in the center of the display) and X and Y coordinates of this position are recorded. As subsequent images are captured during the tracking process, correlation computations are performed by the device to determine the change in direction and distance of the current captured image verses the previously captured image. Once the direction and distance of movement between the images are known, a new marker having different X and Y coordinates is determined. This new coordinate value is the new location of the original object in the current image. The object marker is then moved to the new coordinate position.

The above-described process continues as to each new image captured during tracking. The resulting effect is that the marker tracks the original object of the image in which it was positioned. Even if the marker, and therefore the object, “moves” off of the display, the object’s X and Y coordinates can still be tracked in that new objects are identified and tracked in the same manner. In other words, relationships

(e.g., distance and direction) between tracked objects are known and therefore may be used such that a scene several screens-widths away from the current viewed scene can still be tracked as the camera is panned. When an object that moved off the screen comes back into the live-view image area, its marker can then be re-enabled over the
5 object.

In one example embodiment of the current invention, a digital device would image a view of a scene onto a photo-sensor (102). The digital device would display the view of the scene on a display (104). The digital device would contain at least one control (106) allowing user input into the digital device. The digital device would
10 contain a processor (110) configured to monitor the control (106). The processor (110 or 112) would be configured to enable an object detection module when detecting user input from the control (106). The processor (110 or 112) would be configured to display markers in the display (104) indicating the object detected. The processor (110 or 112) would be configured to track the object across multiple views of the
15 scene, captured by the photo sensor (102).

The foregoing description of the present invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise form disclosed, and other modifications and variations may be possible in light of the above teachings. This invention is not limited to
20 marking object to help focus a digital device, this invention can be used to mark other useful objects, for example but not limited to, light sources, areas of interest, and flash points. The embodiment was chosen and described in order to best explain the principles of the invention and its practical application to thereby enable others skilled in the art to best utilize the invention in various embodiments and various
25 modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. It is intended that the

appended claims be construed to include other alternative embodiments of the invention except insofar as limited by the prior art.